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ABSTRACT

Settings influence children's behavior. There are three relevant aspects of a setting, the space and contents of the space, as in the set of a play, the cast of characters who are present on the set, and the activities which occur on the set involving the cast of characters. The author and her associates have studied children in Okinawa, the Philippines, Northern India, Kenya, Mexico and the United States. Findings indicate that the characteristics of the setting evoke and reinforce habits of social interaction which become the core of a child's behavioral profile. To date, the behavior of Kenyon urban children in city settings have not been explored in detail. Since, however, the problems of city life are of concern both to countries which have been long urbanized and to the developing countries the Child Development Research Unit is embarking on an analysis of the effects of urbanization on Kenyan children. From prior work, some preliminary observation of Kenyan urban children and interviews with urban mothers, an estimate was made of the time young children spend on various sets, the people with whom they interact and the activities they perform. On the basis of findings from the Six Culture Study, some preliminary guesses as to the effects of such variables on children's behavior were made: these are discussed in the body of this report. (Author/JM)

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THE EFFECT OF URBANIZATION ON THE BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN

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In our research on children we have found that settings influence children's behavior. There are three relevant aspects of a setting, the space and contents of the space, as in the set of a play, the cast of characters who are present on the set, and the activities which occur on the set involving the cast of characters. In the six populations[1] we have studied which include children in Okinawa, the Philippines, Northern India, Kenya, Mexico and the United States, children spent varying amounts of time in a variety of settings. Associated with these settings were particular types of behavior. Our findings indicate that the characteristics of the setting evoke and reinforce habits of social interaction which become the core of a child's behavioral profile.

To date we have not explored in detail the behavior of Kenyan urban children in the settings which a city offers to a young child. Since, however, the problems of city life are of concern both to countries which have long been urbanized and to the developing countries the Child Development Research Unit is embarking on an analysis of the effects of urbanization on Kenyan children. From the work of Thomas Weisner and his assistants[2] and some preliminary observation of Kenyan urban children[3] and interviews with urban mothers,[4] we have an estimate of the time young children spend on various sets, the people with whom they interact and the activities they perform. On the basis of our findings from the Six Culture Study, we can make some preliminary guesses as to the effects of such variables on children's behavior.

Let us consider the three relevant aspects of setting in turn and examine the components which have been found to affect behavior. The first two, space and activity, are closely related. The type of activities which occur in the areas frequented by a young child are determined by the nature of the space and these activities in turn afford practice in and reinforce certain types of behavior. Let us take examples from different living arrangements found in Kenya. If children live in a homestead surrounded by two or more acres of land, part of which is under cultivation or in pasture, they can observe or actively participate in gardening or animal husbandry. If, on the other hand, they live in the center of a periurban town on a small plot and the family gardens or pastures are removed from the dwellings, their mothers prefer to leave them at home and hence they may have less frequent chance as young children to observe or participate in subsistence activities. If they live in a housing project with only a few feet of packed clay in front and in back of their housing unit they will have no contact whatsoever with such activities until they return to or visit the country.

In our research we have found that the opportunity and requirement that a child participate in the subsistence economy prescribes certain types of behavior. In the study of children 3-10 years of age in families from six cultures, we found that children who participated in the family economic pursuits were more altruistic than children who had only household chores to perform.[5]

Altruism here is used to refer to three types of observable behavior: the offering of help and support to others and responsbile behavior as measured by the attempt of children to see that their brothers and sisters

and friends obey the rules of the homestead and society. In societies where the only tasks that a parent could assign were housecleaning chores, the children showed proportionately less altruistic behavior. It is our hypothesis that the belief that one is an essential contributor to the economic welfare of the family as well as a participator in activities requiring their performance reinforces helpful and responsible behavior.

It is conceivable that the same training may occur in urban families where the mother works and the older children are responsible for tending their young brothers and sisters as well as keeping house, cooking and even buying the food in the market. Since the societies who value and use children as helpers are those where the women have the heaviest work load,[6] these working mothers in the city may instill the same values and train for the same behavior in their children. On the other hand they may find it more difficult to do so and their children may find it more difficult to live up to expectations because other children in the neighborhood are not given so much responsibility since their mothers are not away during the day. For example, an urban boy left in charge of an infant brother seemed to suffer more in his job and be more tempted by unoccupied neighbors than his counterpart in a country homestead. The latter was able to play around the homestead while the city boy was restricted to the house and small yard. Although the urban mothers who stay home may demand help, they are not really delegating responsibility since they are on hand to supervise and instruct. Our theory would say that for effective responsibilit training to take place the child must be entrusted to perform tasks in the absence of adults.

In sum, at the present stage in our research we would predict that children who do not participate in the subsistence economy will be less responsible and helpful than children who are expected to perform tasks which are clearly related to the economic well-being of the family. Although parents may arrive in the city with values about helpful and responsible behavior they will find it difficult to train their children in these behaviors. Perhaps the mothers themselves were reflecting this pattern when they commented that the ideal situation was to keep children in the country until they had learned right from wrong.[7]

The participation of children in important tasks also affects their obedience.[8] Here our findings from previous studies are less clear but there is some indication that when children are required to be responsible mothers put more pressure on children to be obedient. If this finding holds up we would expect to find less compliant children among an urban sample. Our observations in such homes suggest that mothers who are home all day are more likely to issue commands prohibiting action than to command positive actions. Since the content of their restrictions may appear more arbitrary than positive commands related to task activity, they may find it more difficult to motivate their child to be obedient. For example, the urban mothers we observed struggled to keep their children from playing on the beds. Few similar problems or prohibitions occurred in the country. Furthermore, since the urban mothers commands are less relevant to the welfare of the family as a whole and more motivated by personal feelings, they may be less consistent in following through if the child fails to comply.

A second finding from the Six Culture Study relating behavior to the activities which children perform is the association of their behavior with the economic and social structure of the environment. Children growing up where there is specialization of occupation and social control administered by institutions whose power structure is outside the immediate community tend to be more egoistic than children who grow up where every man has the skills and materials to meet his own and his family's needs and does not require services from others, and where social control is still primarily in the hands of the elders of the town or community. Egoism here includes behavior in which a child is observed to attempt to dominate others, or to seek help, attention or parise from others. In the rural areas of Kenya and less so in the periurban areas, most individuals can, if necessary, build their own houses, make their household equipment and produce their own food. Cooking utensils, cloth, tea, sugar and salt are probably the most notable exceptions. These communities also attempt to settle disuptes between their citizens in informal ways. Even in the periurban areas there is local control of most of the issues which concern the education and training of children. Here too, in times of emergency kin or local neighborhood groups can be counted on to help. Once a family moves into the city, however, it becomes dependent on specialists. The material to repair one's house is not available. One is dependent on the markets for food, on the housing authorities for water. If one trusts and uses the city social control system it is necessary to seek help from strangers. Mothers report that children become more covetous, tempted by the goods they see displayed by neighbors and markets. There are the circumstances we have found to be associated with the increase in egoistic

behavior. The children in these settings are more apt to seek material goods and to seek help as they observe the dependence of their parents on outsiders. Many of the mothers commented that they did not know city ways and had to depend on their husbands and their school age children.[9] They lack the security of the country women who know and feel competent in their roles.

Associated with the loss of self sufficiency is the loss of the belief that one is competent to shape the character and behavior of one's children. Nancy Graves made a comparative study of urban and country mothers and children in Uganda[10] and reports that country mothers in Uganda believe that they have greater control over the shaping of their children than city mothers who are less sure of their efficacy.

The second aspect of setting which affects children's behavior is the cast of characters who customarily perform the daily activities which take place on the set. The important attributes of casts are age, sex, kinship and number. The composition and size of the groups with whom a child interacts varies in both country, periurban areas and city. In any one of these locations the child may have more or less contact with brothers, sisters, cousins, grandparents and other kin. The extended homestead will have a larger cast of characters than the isolated nuclear homestead. A family in the center of twon may have many or few relatives; in the city probably even fewer. In areas with a higher density of population a child is a member of larger play groups unless his mother can successfully restrict him to his/own house and yard (from my observation highly unlikely, for even the most conscientious of mothers). Our research indicates that these variations in size and composition affect two types of behavior, namely

seeking attention, one of the components of egoistic behavior and aggression.

We found in the Six Culture Study that in extended family households or homesteads, when the grandparents lived in the compound children sought attention less than in households where grandparents were not present. It is not clear whether this results from consistently more or less attention on the part of adults. Both ignoral and reward could account for the decrease. Since previous cross-cultural studies and a study by the Child Development Research Unit under the direction of Lee and Ruth Munroe[11] have reported that in extended families where there are more than two adults, infants are held more frequently and attended to more rapidly when they cry, I would favor the hypothesis that they seek less attention because their needs are more consistently met and they have less expectation of deprivation.

The number of children with whom a child interacts also affects his behavior. In our previous research we have found that when more than six children get together in one place the rate of assault and other aggressive behavior increases. The increase in this type of behavior is the result of the attempt of a child to influence others. Their refusal to comply to his wishes instigates the frustrated child to employ a series of techniques of persuasion to achieve his ends. These styles of persuasion become increasingly more aggressive if he continues to be thwarted. This theory would predict that the probability of being able to organize and manipulate the behavior of others would decrease with the number of discreet individuals all of whom have their own motives and aims. A notable exception to this would be the aggregation of a group of children who engage in a game with agreed upon rules. With the exception of pitching stones and bottle cap games and such, the space offered by urban environments makes such

games impossible especially for young urban children who are not supposed to leave the immediate vicinity of the house.

Another consequence of frequent contact with large unstructured play groups is the increase in the likelihood of constant social interaction cutting down proportionately on individual behavior requiring prolonged attention span. There is evidence both from our research in a periurban area of Nairobi and from other studies of children from crowded urban areas that constant interaction with large groups of children leads to distractibility. Cohn[12] in a study sponsored by the Child Development Research Unit found that children who came from the crowded part of a peri-urban town were less apt to pay attention to the planned activities in the Nursery School and engaged in more social interchange than children who came from surrounding homesteads. In sum, our research indicates that interaction with large numbers of other children leads to an increase in both aggressive behavior and distractibility.

Finally, the continual presence of the mother in the cast of characters on the set or close by has the effect of restricting a child. As noted above these mothers frequently commanded their children to stop some type of behavior which they found either irritating in the cramped environment or dangerous because of strange surroundings. Nancy Graves corroborates these findings, reporting that Uganda urban mothers are more restrictive than their country cousins. Furthermore, the mother who has no work or activities away from the house and whose entire work consists of house-cleaning, cooking and child care probably has habits bred from boredom which affect their children. Urban mothers who did not have jobs outside the home spoke nostalgically of the country and expressed the desire to return to work on their shambas. I have the impression they are less

satisfied in their city role.

In sum, we would expect urban living to affect the behavior of children because it confines them to sets where it is impossible for them to participate in subsistence activities but brings them rather in contact with specialists who furnish the goods and services ordinarily acquired self-reliantly by each family in country settings. The urban sets with their associated activities decrease a child's contact with altruistic and self-reliant models and reduct his opportunity to learn and to practice responsible and helpful behavior. They increase his egoistic behavior and covetousness. In addition, he is more apt to use aggressive techniques for persuading other children.

Assuming that further research will corroborate these findings one may ask what are the consequences of the increase in egoistic behavior. It would seem that the shift toward greater concern with one's own personal welfare is consonant with the educational system since schools as well as the city breed the behavior we have classified in this category. School settings encourage children who are ambitious and concerned with personal success. Seeking attention and praise are more acceptable in this environment and the seeker is less apt to be ignored. Those mothers who reported preferring the city stressed the fact that the urban schools were better than country ones and more accessible. They also commented that children were stimulated by the city environment itself and since their mothers were ignorant of city ways learned to cope by themselves or turned to their fathers for guidance. These same mothers stressed the importance of the father's contact with the children. It seems inevitable that

the behavioral profiles of the children reared in the city and eventually by mature adults will change in the predicted direction. If one wishes to counteract such a trend our theory would say that innovations must be made both in the design of cities and in the curriculum and activities planned for children both during and after school.

NOTES

1. Six Cultures: Studies of Child Rearing, B. Whiting (ed.), John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1963.

2. Thomas Weisner, Research Associate of the Child Development Research Unit, University College, Nairobi 1968-70, has been studying a network of families in Kariobangi and their relatives and friends in the rural area where they were born.

3. Observations of children in Kariobangi housing estate made during December 1968 and the Spring of 1969 by R. Ogodo Ogana under the supervision of Thomas and Susan Weisner.

4. Interviews of preliminary sample of urban mothers in Nairobi conducted by M. Pala and R. Ogodo Ogana under the direction of B. Whiting.

5. Children's Behavior in Six Cultures, John Whiting, B. Whiting, et al (in progress).

6. "Space and Numbers: Some Ecological Factors in Culture and Behavior" Robert L. Munroe and Ruth H. Munroe. Paper presented at Meetings on Social Psychological Research in Africa, December 1968.

7. Personal communication from Ying Ying Yuan--Research Assistant, Child Development Research Unit, Nairobi, Summer 1969--based on interviews with city mothers about their image and knowledge of the city.

8. See Children's Behavior in Six Cultures.

9. See Ying Ying Yuans interviews.

10. Nancy B. Graves, Preliminary Report of Country and City Mothers presented at the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Tokyo, 1968.

11. See Munroes,"Space and Numbers."

12. Andrew H. Cohn, Behavior Observations of Kikuyu Nursery School Children in Kenya--mimeographed report January 1968.